

Type of information exchange	When	Purpose	Parties involved
(a) Clarifications	After receipt of proposals	Used when award without discussions is contemplated. Used to clarify certain aspects of a proposal (resolve minor errors, clerical errors, obtain additional past performance information, etc.).	Any offeror whose proposal is not clear to the contracting agency.
(b) Communications	After receipt of proposals, prior to the establishment of the competitive range.	Used to address issues which might prevent a proposal from being placed in the competitive range.	Only those offerors whose exclusion from, or inclusion in, the competitive range is uncertain. All offerors whose past performance information is the determining factor preventing them from being placed in the competitive range.
(c) Discussions (see Subpart E of this part).	After receipt of proposals and after the determination of the competitive range.	Enhance contracting agency understanding of proposals and offerors understanding of scope of work. Facilitate the evaluation process.	Must be held with all offerors in the competitive range.

§ 636.403 What information may be exchanged with a clarification?

(a) You may wish to clarify any aspect of proposals which would enhance your understanding of an offeror's proposal. This includes such information as an offeror's past performance or information regarding adverse past performance to which the offeror has not previously had an opportunity to respond. Clarification exchanges are discretionary. They do not have to be held with any specific number of offerors and do not have to address specific issues.

(b) You may wish to clarify and revise the RFP document through an addenda process in response to questions from potential offerors.

§ 636.404 Can a competitive range be used to limit competition?

If the solicitation notifies offerors that the competitive range can be limited for purposes of efficiency, you may limit the number of proposals to the greatest number that will permit an efficient competition. However, you must provide written notice to any offeror whose proposal is no longer considered to be included in the competitive range. Offerors excluded or otherwise eliminated from the competitive range may request a debriefing. Debriefings may be conducted in accordance with your procedures as long as you comply with § 636.514.

§ 636.405 After developing a short list, can I still establish a competitive range?

Yes, if you have developed a short list of firms, you may still establish a competitive range. The short list is based on qualifications criteria. The competitive range is based on the rating of technical and price proposals.

§ 636.406 Are communications allowed prior to establishing the competitive range?

Yes, prior to establishing the competitive range, you may conduct communications to:

- (a) Enhance your understanding of proposals;
- (b) Allow reasonable interpretation of the proposal; or
- (c) Facilitate your evaluation process.

§ 636.407 Am I limited in holding communications with certain firms?

Yes, if you establish a competitive range, you must do the following:

- (a) Hold communications with offerors whose past performance information is the determining factor preventing them from being placed within the competitive range;
- (b) Address adverse past performance information to which an offeror has not had a prior opportunity to respond; and
- (c) Hold communications only with those offerors whose exclusion from, or

inclusion in, the competitive range is uncertain.

§ 636.408 Can communications be used to cure proposal deficiencies?

(a) No, communications must not be used to:

- (1) Cure proposal deficiencies or material omissions;
- (2) Materially alter the technical or cost elements of the proposal; and/or
- (3) Otherwise revise the proposal.

(b) Communications may be considered in rating proposals for the purpose of establishing the competitive range.

§ 636.409 Can offerors revise their proposals during communications?

(a) No, communications shall not provide an opportunity for an offeror to revise its proposal, but may address the following:

- (1) Ambiguities in the proposal or other concerns (e.g., perceived deficiencies, weaknesses, errors, omissions, or mistakes); and
- (2) Information relating to relevant past performance.

(b) Communications must address adverse past performance information to which the offeror has not previously had an opportunity to comment.

Subpart E—Discussions, Proposal Revisions and Source Selection

§ 636.501 What issues may be addressed in discussions?

In a competitive acquisition, discussions may include bargaining. The term bargaining may include: persuasion, alteration of assumptions and positions, give-and-take, and may apply to price, schedule, technical requirements, type of contract, or other terms of a proposed contract.

§ 636.502 Why should I use discussions?

You should use discussions to maximize your ability to obtain the best value, based on the requirements and the evaluation factors set forth in the solicitation.

§ 636.503 Must I notify offerors of my intent to use/not use discussions?

Yes, in competitive acquisitions, the solicitation must notify offerors of your intent. You should either:

(a) Notify offerors that discussions may or may not be held depending on the quality of the proposals received (except clarifications may be used as described in § 636.401). Therefore, the offeror's initial proposal should contain the offeror's best terms from a cost or price and technical standpoint; or

(b) Notify offerors of your intent to establish a competitive range and hold discussions.

§ 636.504 If the solicitation indicated my intent was to award contract without discussions, but circumstances change, may I still hold discussions?

Yes, you may still elect to hold discussions when circumstances dictate, as long as the rationale for doing so is documented in the contract file. Such circumstances might include situations where all proposals received have deficiencies, when fair and reasonable prices are not offered, or when the cost or price offered is not affordable.

§ 636.505 Must a contracting agency establish a competitive range if it intends to have discussions with offerors?

Yes, if discussions are held, they must be conducted with all offerors in the competitive range. If you wish to hold discussions and do not formally establish a competitive range, then you must hold discussions with all responsive offerors.

§ 636.506 What issues must be covered in discussions?

(a) Discussions should be tailored to each offeror's proposal. Discussions must cover significant weaknesses, deficiencies, and other aspects of a proposal (such as cost or price, technical approach, past performance, and terms and conditions) that could be altered or explained to enhance materially the proposal's potential for award. You may use your judgment in setting limits for the scope and extent of discussions.